

Pre-K Music and the Emergent Reader: Promoting Literacy in a Music-Enhanced Environment

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Emergent literacy may be nurtured in an early childhood environment that integrates literacy experiences with meaningful music activities in which young children develop skills necessary for success in both areas simultaneously. Early childhood educators can develop the knowledge and skills needed to bring music into the classroom as an engaging and stimulating element of literacy education.

KEY WORDS: children's books and music; early childhood and music integration; early childhood music; literacy and music; music and emergent literacy.

WHY IS THE MUSIC AND LITERACY RELATIONSHIP IMPORTANT?

Mavis Lloyd, music specialist, stated in an article entitled *Teach Music to Aid Beginning Readers* that reading teachers have long embraced music as an aid to emergent readers. She drew many parallels between reading music and learning to read. "Both depend upon being able to perceive likenesses and differences in sounds and in the shapes of symbols [auditory and visual discrimination]. Music is read from left to right and top to bottom, the same as reading words [eye-motor coordination]" (Lloyd, 1978, p. 323).

Other parallels between these two language areas drawn by Lloyd included but are not limited to the following: (1) Visual sequential memory: ability to remember sounds and words long enough to obtain meaning comparable to the ability to remember tunes and song words in order to play and sing them; and (2) Language reception: ability to listen to and understand spoken language comparable to the ability to listen to and understand songs and expla-

nations of musical activities (Ibid, 1978, p. 324) (Figure 1).

Lesley Morrow, a reading specialist, also identified the parallel skill of left to right reading orientation in music and reading. In addition, Morrow stated that participation in song activity helps in vocabulary development (Morrow, 1996). Hansen, Bernstorff, and Stuber drew parallels between music and literacy code breaking skills in their book entitled *The Music and Literacy Connection*. Some of those parallels include the following:

1. Phonological awareness: Sensitivity to all units of sound (generating and recognizing rhyme, syllables, beginning and ending sounds, etc.) as compared to sensitivity to all elements of musical sound (recognizing repeated or imitated sound patterns, sequences, stylistic nuances, etc);
2. Phonemic awareness: Identifying and manipulating the smallest sound units in written symbols (e.g. individual letters in "stop") as compared to emphasizing the smallest units of musical sound through musical notation (e.g. individual pitches within a musical phrase);
3. Fluency: Ability to express ideas clearly, verbally or in writing as compared to the ability to perform music smoothly, easily, and readily (Hansen, Bernstorff, & Stuber, 2004, pp. 8-9).

Based upon these thoughts of specialists in the fields of music and literacy, the integration of music into literacy learning settings may aid in language development while promoting musical development at the same time.

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Fig. 1. Listening skills are developed through attending to music.

WHAT DO RESEARCHERS SAY ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMERGENT LITERACY AND MUSIC?

Researchers have long suggested a connection between music and language development (Lannert & Ullman, 1945; Weaver & Nuys, 1943; Wheeler & Wheeler, 1952). It was not until the 1970's, however, that a strong argument was made regarding the nonmusical effects of music in the regular classroom. McDonald revisited the discussion of connections specifically between music and language reading readiness. She stated that developing auditory discrimination was critical to children's reading skills both in music and regular classrooms. A key to successful language reading is the development of attentive listening. This listening skill is strengthened through the varied listening experiences afforded children in the music classroom. McDonald credits music instruction as benefiting children's oral communication and development of sight vocabulary through immersion into a song-rich environment (1975).

Lamb and Gregory (1993) investigated the relationship between musical awareness and reading skills with 18 infant children ranging from 4 years 9 months to 5 years 4 months. The researchers were interested in validating the assumption that a rela-

tionship exists between an awareness of musical sound changes and phonemic awareness. Subjects completed a simple reading test assessing concepts about print, word matching, letter sounding, and word reading. In addition, an assessment of phonic reading and musical ability were administered. All tests were administered across five sessions. The results show that the children who scored high on the phonic awareness measure also scored high on the reading tests. In addition, this same group of children performed well on the pitch discrimination assessment. The investigators suggest a longitudinal study be conducted to study the relationship of pitch discrimination and other aspects of musical ability to reading progress.

HOW DO MUSIC AND LITERACY CONNECT IN THE EARLY LEARNING SETTING?

The following scenario illustrates how music can be integrated into the early childhood setting to support development in literacy and music. A group of four-year olds enrolled in a university-based early childhood center are engaged in a music-integrated literacy lesson featuring the book *Down by the Cool of the Pool* by Mitton (2002). They energetically help the teacher read the story joining in on repeated phrases and demonstrating recall of material read earlier in the book (Figure 2).

Teacher: "Pig came to see. I can dance too. But not like you. I can wiggle. So pig went wiggle, duck went..."

Children: "...flap,"

Teacher: "...and frog cried,"



Fig. 2. Musical activities encourage interaction and dialogue during book readings.

Children: "...wheeeeeeee!"

Teacher: "Can you dance like me?"

Teacher and Children: "Down by the cool of the pool."

At the conclusion of the reading, the children relate pictures of each character to its print symbol at the multi-colored letter board. Afterwards, the children and teacher sing a rousing rendition of *Mr. Froggie Had a Pool* sung to the familiar tune of *Old MacDonald*. Cued by the letter board and visual representations of each character, the children sing about each animal in the order in which it entered the story. "Mr. Froggy had a pool, ee-i-ee-i-o. And near that pool there lived a duck, ee-i-ee-i-o..." On a second round of the song, the children sing and pretend to be the characters of the story. They each receive musical instruments to play when their character is mentioned in the song. Ducks become clicking rhythm sticks, "...with a flap, flap here and a flap, flap there..." Wiggling pigs make jingle bell sounds, "...with a wiggle, wiggle here, and a wiggle, wiggle there..." Frisky dogs make sizzling maracas sounds and the booming sound of the bounding cat on the giant gathering drum follows "...with a bound here, and a bound there; here a bound, there a bound, everywhere a bound bound. Mr. Froggy had a pool, ee-i-ee-i-o!" (Figure 3).

A discussion of the literacy and music standards for early learners that are addressed by the activities engaged in by the children in this scenario follows. Figure 4 presents relevant achievement standards from the four music achievement standards developed by the Music Educators National Conference



Fig. 3. Expressive singing and dramatic play go hand in hand.

(MENC) for four-year-olds in preschools that pertain to the scenario.

Mastery of the music standards by four-year-olds is built upon the assumption that developmentally appropriate activities have been provided at ages 2 and 3. The singing activity in the opening scenario supports expressive singing, provides opportunity for the teacher to monitor growth in pitch and rhythmic accuracy, and gives each child an opportunity to play a variety of instruments. The teacher can influence understanding of steady beat by encouraging children to play their instrument to the steady beat when their animal name is sung. The complete set of MENC Pre-K Music Standards can be viewed at www.menc.org/publication/books/prek12st.html.

Figure 5 presents language and communication standards for four-year-olds per the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) that are relevant to the scenario.

More commonly referred to as widely held expectations, these developmental benchmarks were published in *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs* (1997). The engaging book selected as well as the encouragement of dialogue about the characters during the reading, promote an increase in willingness to talk in front of the group and share personal experiences. Children in the scenario are also increasing their understanding, volume, and use of vocabulary as attention is drawn to beginning and ending sounds in the vocabulary associated with movement in the story. The movement engaged in by the children to represent the animal characters creates experience that promotes learning new vocabulary used by the author to describe character movements. The experience is further reinforced by seeing the print symbols for the movement vocabulary while naming and sounding out the individual letters. The strong rhyme scheme of the book and the repetitive phrases that the children learn and repeat during the reading of the book reinforce their ability to learn and perform simple songs, rhymes, and finger plays.

HOW DO LITERACY AND MUSIC STANDARDS CORRELATE INTERNATIONALLY?

Guidelines for accreditation of early childhood programs set forth by NAEYC in *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs* (1997) have influenced programs within the United States and abroad including such countries as Australia, New Zealand, and British Columbia. The

Scenario-related MENC PreK Music Education Standards

Content Standards	Achievement Standards
Singing and playing instruments	Children... a. use their voices expressively as they speak, chant, and sing; b. sing a variety of simple songs in various keys, meters, and genres e.g., folk songs, ethnic songs, singing games, alone and with a group, becoming increasingly accurate in rhythm and pitch; c. experiment with a variety of instruments and other sound sources.
Understanding music	b. sing, play instruments, move, or verbalize to demonstrate awareness of the elements of music and changes in their usage e.g., changes in rhythm, dynamics, tempo.

Fig. 4. MENC PreK Music Education Standards for four-year olds addressed by activities in the *Down by the Cool of the Pool* scenario.

Scenario-related NAEYC Language and Communication Expectations (4-year-olds)

<p>For 4-year olds -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expands vocabulary from 4,000 to 6,000 words; shows more attention to abstract uses • likes to sing simple songs; knows many rhymes and finger plays • will talk in front of the group with some reticence; likes to tell others about family and experiences • learns new vocabulary quickly if related to own experience ("We walk our dog on a belt. Oh yeah, it's a leash - we walk our dog on a leash")
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Fig. 5. NAEYC language and communication standards for four-year-olds addressed by activities in the *Down by the Cool of the Pool* scenario.

International Reading Association (IRA) serves as the official voice for international best practice approaches to literacy education. In a joint statement with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) approved in 1998 and entitled *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children*, development of literacy skills was presented as being on a developmental continuum progressing through five phases toward the goal of advanced reading at fourth grade and above. Those beginning and intermediate phases are as follows: (1) Awareness and Exploration—Preschool; (2) Experimental Reading and Writing—Kindergarten; (3) Early Reading and Writing—End of First Grade; (4) Transitional Reading and Writing—Second Grade, and (5) Independent and Productive Reading and Writing—Third Grade.

Several activities identified as necessary to literacy development in phase 1 of the literacy develop-

mental continuum during the preschool years are musical experiences and reading aloud to children. The combining of these two experiences into a strategy for development of preschool literacy reflects a belief among IRA members that varied strategies are necessary in order to address the diversity of today's classroom and to stimulate and maintain high interest in reading. Strongly recommended are experiences that develop phonemic awareness through participation in singing, fingerplays, games, poems, and stories rich in phonemic patterns such as rhyme and alliteration. Combining the use of Big Books and music-integrated literacy experiences is thus the type of strategy per IRA and NAEYC that enhances children's exposure to concepts about print. While the use of songs aids in the development of phonemic awareness, it also affords children who are learning English as a second language an opportunity to sing songs in their primary language and in English. According to IRA and NAEYC, this activity

supports children's first language while promoting oral proficiency in English.

The pre-kindergarten standards recommended as developmentally appropriate for early childhood music education were developed by the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) in the United States. Yet they are reflected in the curriculum of the international music community, which also seeks to develop creative expression in children and adolescents while celebrating indigenous music. A brief look at how music underscores literacy development in other countries will illustrate the strong correlation between these two areas.

Guidelines for music education in Australia were directly influenced by the MENC publication *Opportunity to Learn Standards for Music Instruction: Grades PreK-12* (1994). Early childhood music experiences in Australian schools may be provided solely by the generalist classroom teacher as is typical in the United States or in collaboration with a music specialist. Early childhood teachers and music specialists work together to strengthen the impact that engagement in music has upon learning in all areas.

According to the *Fact Sheets on Music Education* provided through MENC, the arts are considered foundation subjects in many countries and contribute to the education of the whole child. The National Curriculum of England places emphasis upon such music skills from recognizing and exploring how sounds can be made and changed to discriminating and exploiting the characteristics and expression in musical genres and styles. These type skills play a key role in the development of phonemic awareness in young children in English schools. In France, a music education curriculum designed to promote listening to, analyzing and valuing music of different periods, memorizing and recognizing musical compositions of progressive difficulty, and judging music critically encourages dialogue between adults and children thus developing vocabulary and creative, critical thinking skills.

Music education in the Caribbean has been influenced by the British National Curriculum and the American National Standards for Music. As such, the Revised Primary Curriculum of Jamaica encourages experiences that give children the opportunity to compose, listen to and appraise music, and perform. Integration of music with social studies and science is encouraged in grades 1–3 (Tucker & Bowen, 2004, p. 1–5). Finnish music education similarly integrates into other subjects through play in their

music playschools, which became extremely popular in the 1990's and involve 20,000 children under school age (Partanen, 2001, p. 2). Similar emphasis is placed on music in preschools in Hungary where children ages 3–6 attend kindergarten and participate in musical plays daily. Music plays a significant role in the national curriculum published in 1998, which supports the traditional singing youth movement from the age of 6. The use of song was noted as significant to language growth in the NAEYC widely held expectations for preschoolers. In Indonesia a singing curriculum is also utilized at the primary level making use of folk songs and dances of the Javanese tradition. Songs are a primary method of teaching the national language to young children. Vocabulary development and self-expression, two goals of literacy education, are addressed via the Indonesian music curriculum. In these and other countries, music and literacy operate together to promote growth in both areas.

WHAT DO PRESCHOOL TEACHERS NEED TO KNOW IN ORDER TO DEVELOP MUSIC-INTEGRATED LITERACY EXPERIENCES?

In order to begin to develop the music-integrated literacy experiences, early childhood teachers need to be aware of how the blending of literacy and music activities can occur and the musical knowledge and skills needed to promote musical confidence when teaching.

1. The Book/Music Blend

Teachers bring a wealth of knowledge regarding children's literature to the music-integrated literacy environment. The book is always at the center of instruction in this suggested lap- or large-group reading format. The musical activities that are integrated should be relevant in some way to the book and provide an opportunity for children to strengthen the music abilities noted in the PreK MENC Standards. Although many interesting and unique books come to mind, it is prudent that the majority of books selected for integrative lessons be popular with children and be a staple in the classroom library. This will also assure that parents can easily access the books through the local library and/or bookstore to extend the learning. Figure 6 presents some suggested books.

Typically a children's song or singing/ring game e.g. *The Farmer in the Dell* can begin the learning experience that mentions the featured character of a book. After sharing the musical experience with the

Resources for Music-integrated Literacy Instruction

- Andress, Barbara (1998). *Music for Young Children*.
- Amidon, Mary Alice, & Amidon Peter (Eds.). (1991). *Jump Jim Joe: Great Singing Games for Children*.
- Amidon Mary Alice, & Amidon, Peter (1997). *Jump Jim Joe: Great Singing Games for Children* [CD].
- Boyer-Alexander, Renè (2002). *Walking in the Light of Freedom: Celebrating African-American History through Children's Songs, Games, Rope Chants and Dances*.
- Burton, Leon, Hoffer, Charles, & Hughes, William (1996). *Bowmar's Adventures in Music Listening* (Level 1).
- Cabrera, Jane (1999). *Over in the Meadow*.
- Classic Books with Holes (2004). *Down by the Station*.
- Classic Books with Holes (2004). *Ten Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*.
- Ehlert, Lois (2000). *Market Day*.
- Golden Books Music (2004). *Preschool Songs: 15 Fun Songs for Kids* [CD].
- Hoberman, Mary Ann (1998). *Miss Mary Mack: A Hand-clapping Rhyme*.
- Martin, Jr. Bill, & Archambault, John (1989). *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*.
- Mitton, Tony (2002). *Down by the Cool of the Pool*.
- National Guild of Community Schools of the Arts (1994). *Listen Here! A Classical Music Listening Library for Children* (Teacher's Manual and Cassettes).
- National Wildlife Federation (2004). *Your Big Backyard: Animal Tunes* [Interactive CD].
- Pinkney, Brian (1997). *Max Found Two Sticks*.
- Raffi (1980). *Baby Beluga* [CD].
- Siomades, Lorianne (1999). *The Itsy Bitsy Spider*.
- Sweet Honey in the Rock (1994). *I Got Shoes* [CD].
- Sweet Honey in the Rock (2000). *Still the Same Me* [CD].

Fig. 6. Suggested resources for use in developing music-integrated literacy experiences.

children and encouraging them to use their best singing voices, a natural segue can occur into the lesson through the musical link made with a character or theme from the story (Figure 7).

All the best practice methods when reading to small children can then be incorporated into the reading of the story to promote emergent literacy. For example, if the book has a repetitive refrain, the children can be encouraged to join in during the reading of the story as the refrain recurs in the book. As mentioned in our earlier scenario, the frog always cries, "Wheel!" The children love to manipulate their voices when making the frog's statement and they will gleefully all join in each time the

teacher reads the repetitive refrain, "Down by the cool of the pool."

Since many children's books are songs in story form, invite the children to sing along as the story is presented e.g. *Down by the Station* or *Miss Mary Mack*. Before the session ends, advantage can be taken of opportunities to expand vocabulary or other literacy activities such as promoting recognition of sight words from the story or identifying rhyme. Musical instruments are a general staple in the early childhood setting; therefore, the reading of the story might be followed with a dramatization or retelling of the story by the children who create a musical accompaniment. Another follow-up activity might be



Fig. 7. Ring games provide opportunity to develop language reception through singing and movement while responding kinesthetically to important aspects of the music.

listening and moving to music representative of the geographical location of the story or moving to music in imitation of characters from the story (Figure 8).

2. Musical Knowledge and Skills Needed to Create the Book/Music Blend

A beginning knowledge of children's songs, chants, hand claps, singing games, and dances is essential to begin integrating music into literacy experiences. There are many fine collections, some of which have an accompanying compact disc to aid in the teaching of songs to the children and that provide age-appropriate listening pieces. Suggested collections are located in the annotated list of resources cited in Figure 6.

A logical starting point in developing a collection of children's music is with songs and singing games from the teacher's childhood experiences as well as those of the children. These familiar songs can then be integrated into the music and literacy experience. For example, borrowing a familiar tune such as *Happy Birthday to You* or *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* and replacing the original words with text relevant to the literacy lesson's featured book is perhaps one of the more common strategies in a music-integrated literacy approach.

Investing in a children's music library in the early learning classroom will also provide the early childhood teacher with easy access to new songs that he or she can learn and then teach to the children through simple imitation during the music and literacy sessions. This music library should also incorporate instrumental pieces of music that represent diverse cultures. This will support the multicultural books the teacher will incorporate into the music and literacy lessons. Musical instruments



Fig. 8. Folk dances relevant to story settings help bring a multicultural flavor to literacy activities and enhance children's responsiveness to diverse musical styles.

designed to be used by all learners can be in this center as well.

When the early childhood instructor integrates music into the literacy experience, it is hoped that he will do so with an awareness of what the PreK MENC Standards reflect. Per those standards, children will spend time singing many different kinds of songs. It is the hope of the music specialists who belong to MENC that the early childhood teacher would assist the children as they learn the difference between their singing voices and speaking voices (Standards Ia & Ib). Children would also be engaged in chanting rhythmic rhymes such as nursery rhymes and using their bodies or rhythm instruments to pat the steady beat or pulse of the rhyme. With this focus on rhythm, they might also sing and step to the beat of the song as they move around the classroom (Standards IIb & IVb).

Engaging children in games where they are guessing the sounds of items related to the story that was read supports another music standard in which children learn how to identify sound sources both musical and nonmusical (Standards IIIa). When a listening experience occurs during a music and literacy lesson, encouraging the children to dialogue about the music they listen to promotes their musical abilities as well (Standard IVa). Initial concern may arise in the mind of the teacher who does not consider herself a polished musician.

However, all the activities described above can be done with a working knowledge of the familiar music that occurs naturally in the early childhood classroom and through frequent use of some of the resources listed in Figure 6. Remember that singing without the aid of instruments or compact discs is natural to children and allows them to listen to their own voices as well as that of the teacher. So, whether inside or outside, singing and movement can occur without the assistance of technology or pianos and guitars.

The music specialist at a local elementary school can be a great resource for the early childhood teacher who wishes to gain added insight into how the music specialist works with young children. Area colleges and universities with music education programs can also assist with enhancing the musical life of early childhood settings through supervised internships of music education majors. Post-secondary institutions and local school districts frequently offer classes that some early childhood educators may want to consider taking. These classes share information about early childhood music and introduce the playing of simple instruments that teachers may wish to incorporate into the early childhood classroom.

HOW CAN EARLY INTERVENTION EFFORTS BE ENHANCED AND STRENGTHENED BY CORRELATED MUSIC AND LITERACY EXPERIENCES?

Literacy education is about developing the ability to communicate effectively. Music is a form of communication, both oral and print, that in many ways develops along a similar continuum to that identified by the IRA. As such, it integrates well with literacy activities designed to support fluent and creative self-expression. Figure 9 presents some ways in which literacy activities and music activities correlate

in addressing similar skills in phase 1 literacy development in preschool.

Vocabulary development and phonemic awareness are supported by the first set of activities. Diversity in song selection during music activities addresses the second language learners' need to preserve the primary language while learning English.

Literacy skills are strengthened by the second set of activities by giving the children opportunities to talk about what they have read in their own unique way. Responsive conversations with the teacher and peers may often be by-products of these types of activities and may further develop interest in reading.

The third set of activities encourages more sophisticated use of language reflective of higher-order thinking and analytical thought. It also encourages a desire to learn more vocabulary for communicating ideas clearly to significant individuals. The fourth set of activities promotes comprehension and retention of information/instructions long enough to reproduce or perform it in a logical and ordered fashion.

CONCLUSION

There are parallel skills in reading and music. A music-integrated literacy environment nurtures auditory and visual discrimination, eye-motor coordination, visual sequential memory, language reception, vocabulary development, phonological and phonemic awareness, and fluency. Simultaneously, musical perception, music score reading, musical memory, song repertoire, and musical performance are enhanced. In the early learning setting, music's engaging nature encourages children to attend during reading activities, invites them to be active listeners, and promotes comprehension and dialogue.

The standards-based approach to integrating music and literacy activities described in this discourse reflects national and international thought regarding developmentally appropriate practice. It is generally agreed that both literacy and music development occur along a continuum toward a common goal of critical and creative expression. As such, both areas require the use of varied strategies in order to optimize growth and development in all learners. Across nations, children are engaged in learning the musical language of their countries through integrative, standards-based approaches that strengthen literacy specifically and learning in general.

Correlated Activities that Support Phase 1 Literacy Development

PHASE 1 GOAL	LITERACY ACTIVITIES	MUSIC ACTIVITIES
Awareness and exploration: Children explore their environment and build the foundations for learning to read and write	1. sing simple songs; learn rhymes and finger plays;	1. sing a variety of simple songs in various keys, meters, and genres(e.g., folk songs, ethnic songs, singing games), alone and with a group becoming increasingly accurate in rhythm and pitch;
	2. talk in front of the group sharing personal experience;	2. use voices expressively in speaking, chanting, and singing;
	3. use more advanced sentence structures, such as relative clauses and tag questions ("She's nice, isn't she?") and experiments with new constructions, creating some comprehension difficulties for the listener;	3. use own vocabulary and standard music vocabulary to describe voices, instruments, music notation, and music of various genres, styles, and periods from diverse cultures;
	4. retelling a four- or five-step directive or the sequence in a story.	4. play simple melodies and accompaniments on instruments.

Fig. 9. Correlated literacy and music activities that support Phase 1 goals on the Literacy Continuum for 4-year-olds.

Research has long established the music and literacy connection. The ability to listen is most keenly developed in musical settings and is necessary to successful language reading.

Globally, the responsibility for introducing music into the world of early learners is met most often by the preschool educator. She helps children realize that music is a natural part of their daily lives. In doing so, music becomes an open door for learning beyond its core content boundaries. There is a need for increased preparation and resources that can equip preschool educators to integrate music into early literacy education in a manner that maintains the integrity of both learning areas while strengthening parallel skills. In order to do this with efficiency and confidence, preschool educators are encouraged to draw upon best practice in literacy instruction, a knowledge of quality children's literature reflective of diversity, music resources identified as supporting ease of integration into literacy instruction, and the expertise of pre-K-12 and collegiate music specialists.

In a booklet entitled *Teaching Our Youngest*, the Early Childhood-Head Start Task Force stated that the learning environment for young children should celebrate diversity, provide for instruction that uses a

variety of strategies, and promote critical thinking (2002). Music-enhanced early literacy experiences do celebrate and support diversity, are representative of varied and creative instructional approaches, and inherently promote critical and creative thinking.

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